DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 066 939 FL 003 075

AUTHOR Huntsman, Beverly S.
TITLE Some Sociological Factors in Educating Bilinguals.
PUB DATE 1 Mar 72
NOTE 9p.; Paper presented at the Sixth Annual TESOL Convention, March 1, 1972, Washington, D.C.

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS *Attitudes; Bilingual Education; English (Second Language); Language Usage; *Minority Groups; *Occupational Aspiration; Orientation; *Second Language Learning; *Social Factors; Sociology; Standard Spoken Usage; Stereotypes; Success Factors; Teacher Role; Teaching Methods

ABSTRACT

The sensitive area of language attitude as it relates to cultural and educational stereotyping should be explored openly and frankly in the classroom to erase false ideas and misbeliefs about language usage. The "Corrective Approach" in English-as-a-second-language instruction, which assumes that Standard English exists, is necessary for improved intellectual performance, and is best acquired through constant correction, should be abandoned in favor of methods that allow the student to see realistically the role of language in society. This way the student will not be required to judge only himself and his performance against a so-called norm of Standard English, a comparison which reduces the student's opinion of himself and, therefore, his chances of future success. (VM)

... OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL OFFICE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

SOME SOCIOLOGICAL FACTORS IN EDUCATING BILINGUALS

ED 066939

Bilingual education, or teaching English as a second language, in the U.S. has historically been concerned only with the lower elementary grades, usually terminating somewhere between grades four and six. After these years of formal training, the students have been expected to function as English monolinguals, with only occassional and random attention to any residual language problems which they might have. Traditionally, the English teacher has been the person upon whom the task of Guardian of the Language has fallen. Usually he is trained in literature and has no formal training in language (to say nothing of ESL, or the native language of his students). The methods which he knows, and so employs, generally consist of

1. extensive red-pencil correcting of written themes (ordinarily with quite uncommunicative comments such as AWK and UNG) and 2. periodical oral correction of lexical, grammatical, and phonological usage. For example: "No, Maria, it's 'ship', not 'sheep'." Not only do such unsystematic methods confuse and discourage the students, but the usual justification offered by the teacher for the need for such corrections--that it will help the students to get good jobs when they finish school--may be unrealistic and misleading.

It is likely that the teacher may not be aware of the effect he is producing on his students. Those effects, discussed later, are probably a direct result of the following:

1. He reflects, in his approach, a cultural attitude towards language and language usage which is, in turn, merely a microcosm of attitude towards other cultures in general, especially towards minority cultures.

FL 003 075

2. Children show developmental trends in their attitudes and perceptions of vocations, and, in particular, do not show awareness of the qualifications needed for particular occupations until quite late in this development.

Let us take the second point first. In the upper grades, a good deal of attention, it seems to me, is devoted to attempting to delineate the relationships between various activities and future occupations, although in somewhat negatve ways, such as: "if you don't do so and so, you won't be able to do...". Yet studies show that there is some discrepency between a child's choice of a future job in terms of what he would <u>like</u> to do, and what he really <u>expects</u> to do. This discrepency is related to at least two factors. Eli Ginzberg (1951) points out the first: occupational choice is a process which is largely irreversible, involving compromise as an essential aspect, especially at the three developmental periods of choice--fantasy, tentative, and realistic. At the fantasy level (ages 8-11), the child identifies possible future occupation in terms of what he wants to 'be' as an adult, without assessing his ability to 'be' so--in other words, without regard to the qualifications needed for the occupation. For example, he usually identifies his choice in those terms: "I want to <u>be</u> a teacher." During the tentative period (c. age 11-18,19), the child or adolescent, views his choice in terms of what Ginzberg calles 'subjective' factors--interest, capacities, and values. In particular, the child feels that he himself is in a state of change, so that the factors he uses on which to base his occupational choice are also in fluctuation, resulting in <u>tentative</u> rather than <u>permenant</u> choices. In addition, the period in which he begins to consider his own capacities comes at about ages 13-14, somewhat into the tentative stage. At this time he begins to look at how well he does in certain activities and to take this into account. For example, he begins to say "I'd like to be a scientist but I don't do very well at math so I guess I'll have to do something else." At this time, "capacities," however, are largely assessed in terms of <u>grades</u> which he receives in school, which can lead to faulty assessments because grades do not always reflect abilities. He begins to consider occupational

values at about age 15-16, trying Ginzberg says, to 'find a place for himself in society' (p. 75). The kinds of values he weighs at this point are things like job security, place of work, and to a limited extent, income although he has a very limited idea of economics. The final stage, that of 'realistic choices' does not begin until about age 18. It is at this stage that he begins to work out compromises between what he wants and the opportunities available to him.

It is during the tentative stage that the teacher attempts to justify the use of 'good English' as essential in obtaining a 'good job'. The teacher obviously assumes that such a deliniation is an intuitively obvious and completely compelling argument that by its mere articulation will impell the student to extend his effort to obtain 'good English' and help him make a worthy occupational choice. This assumption does not seem to be borne out, however, in view of the large numbers of students who do not obtain 'good English' and about whose procurement of a 'good job' we know very little, although in the absence of positive evidence, we can assume that relatively few such 'good jobs' are secured. Obviously, the teacher's attempt at providing motivation does not work for most of his students.

This brings us to the second factor related to the discrepencies in the child's choices between desired and expected future occupation. Lewin (1944) pointed out that subjects weighed the probabilities of success versus failure, and made calculated choices regarding the risk. In particular, he noted that discrepencies between stated goals and performance levels could be influenced by a. the standards of one's own group; b. the standards of other groups; c. the psychological effects of socio-economic background; and d. habitual success and failure. Obviously, all of these factors are extremely important to the adolescent, and especially important to the minority adolescent. In fact, Gardner, Lambert, and their associates at McGill have emphasized the importance of reference groups in several second language learning situations. Equally important for the students that I am talking about seem

to be the last two factors. Ginzberg, in citing an earlier study says:

> 'Those individuals giving relatively low (negative or low positive discrepency score), when compared to those giving predominately high positive, are found to be also in a relatively more favorable social and economic position.' (p. 343)

In addition, he notes:

> 'Those [children] of the past failure group showed higher goal discrepency on the average than those of the past success group. More pronounced, however, was the wide variability among subjects of the failure group, such that the range of discrepencies was from very high positive to negative scores.' (p. 344)

In other words, those students with a lower SES and/or a history of failure tend to set their goals at levels unrealistic with their performance, either too high or too low. Let me emphasize here that in no way are we making any claims about their abilities, except as one might choose to infer from performance--which inferences I would strongly urge against.

Additionally, Lewin points out that when subjects are asked to state what they expect to do as well as what they like to do, the discrepency scores between performance and expectation are lessened. Let me emphasize here that Lewin made this information available almost 30 years ago, Ginzberg his almost 20 years ago, and recent investigations (Wright, Kuvlesky) show that their studies are still applicable. Yet it has only been in the past 5 years or so that educators have begun to be aware of their truth in the classroom, and many teachers still don't recognize the syndrome.

Thus it seems that the reason most frequently adduced by the teacher for his students to learn standard English is not only ineffective but, more importantly, actually reduces the student's opinion of himself and therefore his chances of future success, including occupational success. The student who does not do well in the English classroom will see himself as a failure. In evaluating his own performance in such a way, he may very well react in a way entirely contradictory to his teacher's desires, concluding either that he will not, in fact, be able to obtain a good job (setting his aspiration level

too low) or that his command of Standard English really will make little difference (setting his aspiration level unrealistically high).

What does all of this mean to the upper-level classroom teacher? It means, first of all, that, if his desire is truly to help his students achieve success, he must re-evaluate his methods and the principles upon which such methods are founded. He must, in this re-evaluation, frankly assess the effects of such methods on his students. What <u>are</u> the principles upon which such methods are based?

First, the 'Corrective Approach', as I shall call it, assumes that there is such a thing as Standard English, and that it must, should, and can be obtained by all who use the language, and that anything falling short of this Standard is unacceptable.

Second, the Corrective Approach assumes that the best way for the student to acquire the Standard is through constant correction whenever 'mistakes' occur, using the 'Standard' as a performance model.

Third, the Corrective Approach assumes that acquisition of the Standard will enable the student to refine his entire thought processes, resulting in Clearer and More Logical Thinking and therefore in improved intellectual performance.

Finally, and most insidiously, the Corrective Approach assumes that there is only one way that the student can function productively in society, and that is by acquiring Anglo-English and conforming to Anglo norms and expectations.

As a corollary to this last principle, we find that productive functioning is, in fact, almost synonomous with that nefarious 'good job', and so, the need for 'good English' in order to obtain it.

Such an approach, however, often leads to failure for both the students and teachers. Students drop out of school, or leave with borderline records, and the teacher is frustrated and helpless, unable to reconcile his amorphous attitude with those he sees in the students ("They don't seem to <u>care.</u>").

In his attempt to narrow the discrepancy between performance and goal--English usage and future occupation--he has in many cases succeeded only in a very negative way, by lowering the aspiration level, rather than raising the performance level. By constantly reminding the students of their failures (through correction, etc.), he reinforces their self-evaluations as failures, and as a result, their aspirations and expectations become adjusted in the direction of their own assessment of their capacities during this tentative period of occupational choice. The result: another completion of the intercultural cycle where the victim and the victimizer play out their roles.

How can such a cycle be broken? The teacher, for his part, must, in his re-evaluation, question the validity of the Corrective Approach principles. We have seen that they have failed significantly where the students use a non-standard dialect of English--why should we assume that they will work for the student who uses a form of English influenced by another language? We have seen that for the Black student, getting a good job is <u>not</u> simply a matter of speaking Standard English (as Jim Sledd so succintly pointed out in his "White Supremacy" paper)--why should we suppose the case to be any truer for students who belong to a minority group that is equally discriminated against? In fact, it seems to me that, ironically, after some years of attempting to adopt ESL methods to the dialect classroom, that now the teacher in the ESL classroom could adopt some techniques developed in the dialect classroom.

In particular, I am suggesting that the upper-level English teacher explore openly and frankly with his students the sensitive area of language attitude, as it relates to cultural and educational stereotyping. This means not only those attitudes which exist outside the classroom, but also those <u>in</u> the classroom which have for so long been suppressed and/or denied. This means not only those attitudes which the students have acquired, but also those which the teacher has learned. (And the teacher need not necessarily be an Anglo for this to apply.)

In addition, I am suggesting that the teacher obtain from each student his occupational aspiration and expectations in order to assess realistically the discrepencies which he may wish to narrow. Obviously the English teacher is not a guidance counselor, but such information could be used, it seems to me, quite effectively in the English classroom, if only to help define for the teacher what a 'good job' means to the child. Such information might be obtained through informal conversations with each student, or by some group paper and pencil survey.

There are a number of ways that the teacher might begin to explore with his students the area of language attitude. Several attitude surveys, designed for dialects, could be modified for classroom use where English is the second language of the students.

Adrienne Cox (1971), using photographs and tape recordings of different speakers telling stories, asked young children to identify the photograph to which a voice belonged. This approach would be quite adaptable to the classroom, with discussion hinging on such points as differences in choices which the students (and perhaps the teacher) made, in attempting to explain such choices, and to explore the non-language factors which influenced such a choice.

Another approach would be similar to that used by Frederick Williams (1971) where photographs of children with different ethnic backgrounds (Chicano, Black, White) were shown with tape recordings of their speech. However, tapes and photographs were mixed, so that the voice heard did not belong to the photograph shown simultaneously with it (although the testees were led to believe that it was the voice of the child in the photograph). When asked to comment on the language of a child, the subjects tended to give lower ratings to those photographs of Chicanos or Blacks, even when the coincident voices had been those of the White children and vice versa. This could be adopted to the second language classroom for students to assess their own prejudices and stereotypes as they are reflected in their analyses of language.

A third possibility would be an adaptation of the attitude survey by Labov in New York City (1966) where the subjects were asked to rate on a scale the highest possible job that they thought each taped speaker could hold. This, of course, would also open the avenue for discussion of that whole area of the relationship of English usage to occupation, and both students and teachers might find some surprising and useful revelations stemming from such a discussion.

A fourth possibility, designed for assessing the relationship between job aspiration, expectation, and perception of cultural roles (Huntsman, 1972) might also be adapted for classroom use. Here the students are asked to identify their future occupations, not only as they perceive them, but also as they think others perceive them. In addition, (and this might be done separately or in conjunction with the above) they are asked to complete a cultural attitude scale which focuses on their perceptions of stereotypes in both their own and the 'other' culture. The information obtained from such a scale could serve for investigation and discussion by the students of their roles in society, both presently and in the future, and how to reconcile the conflicts which may be present. In addition, the survey itself with its various items, could be used as a basis for discussing role-concept and its relation to English usage.

Any of these approaches could serve as springboards for dealing with language attitudes in the classroom. On-going projects might then be developed by the students, projects which might range from searching literature for various language and cultural attitudes, to projects involving investigation of connotative word meaning, dealing with the attitudinal aspects of semantics, to projects in which students investigate English usage (and other) requirements for various occupations, to projects where students look at attitudes implicit in their <u>own</u> native languages as well as in English (attitudes like 'Spanish is a prettier language than English.').

One of the major advantages that I see of such a program is that the student is no longer required to judge only himself and his performance against some ill-defined norm, but also has an opportunity to look at the language usage and attitudes of others and to see realistically the role of language in his society. Hopefully he will come to understand that much of his 'failure' is due to attitudes which must and can be dealt with daily, in a conscious way in order to effect a change in the direction of tolerence; due to attitudes rather than to innate abilities which he feels he cannot change and so must live with forever.

Beverly S. Huntsman
Urban and Overseas English Programs
Indiana University